

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

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9/3/82

# Memorandum

ARGENTINA (62200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/APS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s): \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: 9/3/82

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

☐ Classify as \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ Extend as \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ Downgrade to \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Declassify on \_\_\_\_\_ Reason \_\_\_\_\_

TO : The Ambassador,

THRU: The DCM

FROM : POL - Mr. King

POL - John F. Keane

SUBJECT: Foreign Ministry Cooperation on Human Rights

September 3,

I lunched Friday with Counsellor Colombo Murua, the Foreign Ministry Human Rights Officer. Towards the end of the conversation, Colombo asked if the Embassy had received any additional requests from U.S. Congressmen regarding individual human rights cases. I responded that we had received a copy of a letter from Congressman Bonker to President Bignone regarding three alleged disappearances and one individual who may be detained under PEN powers in La Plata. Colombo then volunteered that it looks as though the GOA will soon lift its policy of withholding cooperation on human rights matters with the U.S. Government. He said the disposition is growing within GOA Councils to improve relations with the U.S. in general and specifically to recommence cooperation in human rights matters reflecting the Government's forward movement on human rights in general. However, Colombo has not yet received specific authorization to accept letters from Congressmen forwarded by the Embassy, or other representations. He expects to receive such authorization soon, however.

I pointed out to Colombo that an up-to-date list of recent releases of PEN prisoners would be particularly useful to us in preparing the annual Human Rights Report to Congress and in informing Congressmen about the release of individuals in which the Congressmen had expressed an interest.

Colombo asserted that the Government is determined to wind up the problem of PEN detainees long before the new civilian government assumes power. Apart from the GOA's image, he said, there are a number of legal and practical difficulties in continuing to hold prisoners until March 1984. From the legal standpoint, the Government will have no basis for holding PEN prisoners after the state of siege is lifted. From the practical standpoint, the Government believes it would be wiser



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to release the prisoners into parole status so that they can be watched and controlled. If parolees violate the law, they can then be handed over to the courts, but in the case of sudden release without restrictions in March 1984 or earlier, it would be more difficult for the authorities to monitor their activities. (NOTE: On September 3 Bignone told the Christian Democrats that the state of siege would be lifted "for the electoral campaign", but not until the parties are reorganized. Thus, Bignone apparently intends for the state of siege to be lifted sometime between May and September next year.)

Colombo commented on changes in command in the Air Force. He said the new team are "Nationalists" and Colombo was kind enough to try to offer a definition. They believe in an ideal of autonomous national decisionmaking and lack of dependence or commitments to the outside world to the extent possible. They have no coherent economic ideology but are more conservative than populist, in the Ongania mold. They would like domestic industry to supply most of Argentina's requirements, i.e. autarky. They lean toward non-alignment. They are fervent Catholics, have close ties to the Church and are dogmatic in their views. Thus, they reject materialism and are strong anti-communists. But they also tend to be intolerant, inflexible and not very pragmatic. They would prefer to take the Air Force out of politics, with which they are very uncomfortable, and support the return to civilian rule.

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